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Abstract

The bicentenary of invasion and settlement, 1988, challenges nonAboriginal Australians as never before to confront and analyse the racism that pervades hegemonic cultural discourses and practices. Looking back to the noisy decades around the turn of the twentieth century, the crucial formative period of modern Australian cultural nationalism, one is struck by the silence of and about Aboriginal people. White Australians' exclusion of Aboriginals has been, I would argue, crucial to our self-constitution as 'Australian' - an identity, a unity, whose meaning derives from its discursive displacement of the 'other' race, just as its power as a nation state derives from the appropriation of Aboriginal land.¹ In that respect, Australian culture is still colonial.

‘Wives and mothers like ourselves, poor remnants of a dying race’: Aborigines in Colonial Women’s Writing

The bicentenary of invasion and settlement, 1988, challenges non-Aboriginal Australians as never before to confront and analyse the racism that pervades hegemonic cultural discourses and practices. Looking back to the noisy decades around the turn of the twentieth century, the crucial formative period of modern Australian cultural nationalism, one is struck by the silence of and about Aboriginal people. White Australians’ exclusion of Aborigines has been, I would argue, crucial to our self-constitution as ‘Australian’ – an identity, a unity, whose meaning derives from its discursive displacement of the ‘other’ race, just as its power as a nation state derives from the appropriation of Aboriginal land.¹ In that respect, Australian culture is still colonial.

A colonial culture constitutes itself as an identity, a unity, on the basis of its discursive constructions of racial difference: the excluded ‘other’ becomes the ground on which the national figure is delineated, the buried foundation on which its structure of power is erected. In an account of the way in which the dominant culture represents to itself its own identity by simultaneously defining and denying the difference of the ‘other’, what is at issue is not correcting misrepresentations, nor replacing them with authentic ones, but rather recognising the ways in which the meaning of the one derives from its discursive (dis)placing of the other. In the discussion which follows, then, ‘Aboriginality’ is a term in white discourse and not a reference to historical/social persons.²

Late nineteenth-century discourse on race difference is one of the axes on which Australian cultural nationalism has been constructed. The other axis is gender difference: constructions of femininity have been excluded, women as social subjects have been marginalised, in dominant representations of Australianness, and women’s cultural production has been

buried except when it was compatible with the malestream.³ For this very reason women's representations of Aboriginal people are significant, for they manifest not only the ambivalence characteristic of all colonial discourse but also, contradictorily, some recognition of women's shared position with these other Others. In particular, Aboriginal women as represented in their writing are occasions of momentary affirmations of the potential affinity of women in a culture that is also patriarchal.

The question is not, of course, whether white women writers were racist but, rather, whether and how their racism has differed from white men's.⁴ Inevitably they draw on the 'available discourses'⁵ of evolution and racial purity, which construct Aboriginals as radically 'other'; yet the marginal position assigned to women as cultural agents means that they will deploy these discourses differently from white men. They construct race difference and relate it to gender difference in specific ways, which on examination reveal the ambiguities of their position as members of the dominant power – but not quite; similarly, the ambiguity of their position as women, shared with Aboriginal women – but not quite.

These ambiguities are strikingly caught in the statement from which this essay's title phrase is taken: Aboriginal women are 'wives and mothers like ourselves' wrote Louisa Lawson in the leading article of her feminist paper, *The Dawn*, in 1897; but they are also 'poor remnants of a dying race'. Because of this, she urges her readers 'to show consideration and kindness ... sympathizing in their troubles, alleviating, as far as possible, their hardships, and honoring their womanhood as we honor our own'.⁶ The recognition of likeness, of identity as women across the racial divide, is strikingly unusual for that historical period, but even more striking is the simultaneous invocation of this shared gender *identity* and of racial *difference* in its most extreme form – the commonplace reference to Aborigines as a dying race.

In the context of 1890s public discourse Lawson's statement is unusual in mentioning Aborigines at all. The journalism of that period manifests almost total silence about the Aboriginal inhabitants of the continent. Assertions of white racial identity and purity abound, but they are most commonly articulated through the exclusion of the Chinese, the Kanakas, Afghans and Indians – those peoples who appeared to threaten by their presence as immigrant or indentured workers the achievements of the new labour movement. The 'White Australia' policy which emerged from this period

does not seem to have been articulated with reference to the Aborigines.⁷ They were simply not perceived as actors on the contemporary scene.

The majority of Aborigines in south eastern Australia were, for white urban writers at this time, out of sight and out of mind, in fringe camps around country towns or on remote reserves. (Lawson refers to 'Bush readers' who would know what she is talking about.) Moreover they were *written* out of sight by the operation of the prevailing evolutionist discourse on race. This discourse constructed Aborigines as a race doomed inevitably to die out after contact with the more highly evolved Europeans, the belief being that they represented the most primitive form of humanity, one which could not survive in contact with the supposedly more evolved and superior white race. This discourse gained force with the spread of popular Darwinism in the late 19th century, although the notion of the dying race had emerged very early in colonial writings.⁸ By the late nineteenth century it obviously functions as a displacement of white knowledge that the massacres and disease which accompanied invasion and settlement had had near-genocidal effects. Furthermore, the *biological* definition of race in evolutionist discourse meant that only so-called 'full-bloods' were considered as authentic Aborigines, and others were rendered invisible.⁹ The constructing race as a fixed essence that cannot change, but can only live or die, that discourse allows no possibility of a culture of resistance and survival, and thus denies the historical experience of Aboriginals in southern and eastern Australia. That is, the ideological work of racism within nationalist discourse around the turn of the century had silently buried the miscegenation and near-genocide involved in its pioneer past.

Gillian Cowlshaw has argued that this discourse on a racial purity of 'blood' was never displaced in Australian social anthropology, but remains submerged in the concept of 'traditional Aboriginal culture' as the defining characteristic of Aboriginality.¹⁰ She reminds us of the enormous influence which anthropological discourse has had for at least the past century, in the culture at large as well as in government policy on Aboriginal affairs. Certainly, Australian governments have continued to arrogate to themselves the power to determine who is and who is not counted as Aboriginal, a situation which has prevailed until the recent upsurge of political activity by people claiming Aboriginal identity for themselves. And the ideas just

outlined are far from dead in current commonsense discourse about race relations in Australia and elsewhere.

In the context of feminist debate, Lawson's statement about Aboriginal women is equally unusual. Feminist activists eager to contest the emerging masculinist definition of national culture and to place their own agenda in the public eye¹¹ rarely drew attention to class differences among women and certainly not to differences of race and ethnicity.

The young Miles Franklin in her 1909 comic novel about the women's vote, *Some Everyday Folk and Dawn*, allows her characters to refer casually to 'black gins' as a caricature of everything a respectable white woman is not.

Lawson's statement, by involving the ideologically sacred category of motherhood as the principle of unity among women, avoids this whole question of the sexual status colloquially attributed to 'black gins' in racist patriarchal discourse. Australian feminists appear to have been remarkably reticent about sexuality, even on questions of women's sexual vulnerability: prostitution was generally referred to euphemistically, and there was nothing – as far as we know yet – like the British campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts to push them into taking a more explicit stand. And it would have been in relation to such issues that the popular construction of Aboriginal women as prostitutes might have emerged in public debate.¹² Although many feminists were vehement about men's sexual 'selfishness',¹³ there seem to be few overt attacks on the history of their sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women. Two literary references to de facto marriages between an Aboriginal woman and a white man imply criticism of the man but not of the woman: Louisa Lawson's ballad, 'The Squatter's Wife' (who is met on her arrival on the selection by the sight of two huts, one for her and the other for his 'black gin' [sic] and her family), and Catherine Martin's novel, *The Silent Sea* (1892), where the husband sends his Aboriginal woman away and attempts to keep the child she has borne by him.¹⁴ In her reference to 'Wives and mothers like ourselves', however, the common womanhood that Lawson wants to 'honor' is identified with motherhood.

The affirmation and honouring of women's shared identity as mothers may be traced back in Australian women's writing to Eliza Dunlop's poem on the Myall Creek massacre of 1838, 'The Aboriginal Mother', and forward to Catherine Martin's 1923 novel, *The Incredible Journey*. In the poem such

an affirmation is implicit in the sentiments attributed to the Aboriginal woman, and Dunlop's strategy in representing her thus has been criticized as merely illustrating a 'European theme' of women's vulnerability; yet this criticism of the poem's 'authenticity' in representing an Aboriginal woman is not so very far removed from those of Dunlop's male contemporaries who chided her for giving an 'entirely false idea of [their idea of] the native character'. Both are somewhat beside the point, given that the poem is quite explicit in its polemical purpose of awakening sympathy for 'a people rendered desperate and revengeful by continued acts of outrage'.¹⁵

Almost a century later Catherine Martin published her novel, *The Incredible Journey*, with a similar purpose.¹⁶ The wider significance of her story, she argued in her Introduction, is its 'peculiar ethical value', because when 'a wild woman of the lowliest race which has struggled to the rank of humanity' demonstrates such heroic and devoted love, 'it seems a pledge that Nature has some affinity with good as a development of her order' (p. 13). Here again is the classic ambivalence of colonial discourse, the simultaneous affirmation and disavowal of likeness, the construction of racial difference as absolute. As Margaret Allen argues in her Introduction to the new edition, Martin was challenging the contemporary view of Aborigines' lower natures by affirming that the womanly quality of maternal love transcends this racial difference. The evolutionary scale of race is left unquestioned, however. There are perhaps undertones here of a specifically feminist version of evolutionary theory, which contradicted the male view that women were less highly evolved than men by arguing that maternal love was highest on the scale of human feeling, the most altruistic.¹⁷ In this respect, Martin's novel is closer to the late nineteenth-century works we have been considering here, even though it was not published until 1923, when the author was an elderly woman. Nevertheless, the evolutionary discourse on race persisted: it emerges clearly in Prichard's 1929 Introduction to *Coonardoo*, the text often cited as the great breakthrough in white representations of Aboriginality.

The emphasis on motherhood as constitutive of a shared femininity is less evident in women's writing of the earlier period which belongs to the colonial romance genre of exotic adventure in the outback. Far from being seen as actors on the contemporary scene of nation-making, Aborigines as constructed in these texts are doubly distanced from it: they appear in the

romance genre favoured by women but scorned by male nationalist writers, and, within that genre, they appear as distant in place and time from the scene of contemporary writing. The setting of these texts is not so much the 'Bush' as it is constructed by male nationalist writers like Henry Lawson,¹⁸ but that other place, the dream-country of writers like Rosa Praed and Jeannie Gunn, the 'Never-Never' land of the far North and West, or in the unspecified outback locations favoured by Barbara Baynton. It is a construction of an imaginary 'frontier' which has specific meanings in women's writing, most notably as an escape from daily domesticity and the straitjackets of middle-class patriarchal social exchange. Much later, Katherine Prichard's fiction set in the Kimberleys would show signs of this inheritance from earlier women's popular romantic writing.

In these remote settings, Aboriginal characters are usually presented as retaining some features of traditional tribal life, although they are already deprived of their traditional lands and living in camps on cattle stations (but not, as so many actually were in the south-east, on missions or in towns). This works to construct them as exotic for the fiction's readership – exotic and sometimes threatening, like the 'wild' or 'Myall' blacks that are a shadowy presence in the more romantic of these texts. That is to say, the Aboriginal characters are represented, with an ambivalence characteristic of colonial discourse, as an 'other' both familiar and menacing, in its difference, to the white subject of that discourse:¹⁹ they are both fierce and childlike in their 'wildness', both barbaric and orderly (in terms of their own culture), both treacherous and loyal servants, and so on. Thus they are pitied for their imminent doom as a 'race', but also feared for the threat of their reprisals for land expropriated, women raped, children taken away and whole groups massacred by white settlers.

This fascination with the exotic gives rise to an interest in traditional mythology which emerges in the recounting of 'dreamtime stories' by white writers. The result is a kind of commodification of the myths – which we see still going on in relation to aboriginal art. Sacred tales are retold in such a way as they can be read as bedtime stories for white children (Kathleen Langloh Parker) or, more offensively, as occasions for derision at their 'primitive superstitions' (such as the references to 'debil-debils' and so on in *The Little Black Princess* by Jeannie Gunn). Traditional stories are exchanged between the Aboriginal women characters in *The Incredible Journey*, which at

least grants them a fictional status akin to their original cultural purposes. In making these appropriations, women writers were taking part in a proto-anthropological tradition of observing Aboriginal culture which was already well established by white men, and by and large they shared in its racism as well as its ambivalent respect for cultural difference.

Within this tradition of observation, certain indices of difference earned no deference at all from white writers: these are Aboriginal social practices and laws, rather than myths and rituals, and are of special interest in relation to representations of sexuality and gender order. As Ross Gibson's study of early colonial writings shows, whites often expressed disapproval of the Aboriginals' sexual division of labour and also of arranged marriages between old men and young women, two practices which they regarded as especially barbaric. Their emphasis on the 'natural' degradation of these practices allowed, of course, the implication that the 'civilized' white race never oppressed women in comparable ways. Frequent objections to the power of tradition, as embodied in tribal elders, appear to be an expression of the progressivism with which they justified ideologically the widespread strategy of colonization by depriving the elders of their traditional authority.

The earlier male writers particularly deplored the 'despised and degraded' condition of Aboriginal women, even referring to them as 'slaves'.²⁰ In later women's texts, this chivalarous white perception of the ill-treatment of black women is used very differently to make the feminist point that all women are badly treated under patriarchal regimes. It is another instance of representing women as unified across cultural difference, like the 'wives and mothers' argument: for example, in Praed's *Policy and Passion* a woman character complains that white women are no better off than lubras, for 'we are sold like them', she says.²¹

The early commentators appear to have been fascinated by Aboriginal courting customs which they saw as 'a romantic ritual of dominance and surrender', entailing 'the seizure by physical violence of any woman whom a warrior desires for a mate'.²² Gibson also notes that while they are happy to attribute such brutal lust to Aboriginal men, these male writers scarcely mention the indelicate subject of miscegenation. What they focus on instead is the romance of elopement in defiance of tribal law. In most colonial fictions where it is employed, this motif of the 'free marriage' brings disruption and violence in its wake. It is a useful plot device, therefore, which also

incidentally functions to underline the alleged instability of Aboriginal tribal life. The writers' target, if specified, is usually the barbarity of Aboriginal custom, in particular its deference to the power of the old men. But the use of this device may also be read as a discursive displacement of the *historical* situation where a different kind of illicit union, that between white man and black woman, frequently caused disruption and violence.

In women's fiction the motif of young Aboriginal lovers eloping to evade tribal-law marriage is also very popular, but its use brings into play different attitudes from those of the male writers. In Rosa Praed's *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land*, such an elopement proves to be the testing point of the heroine's marriage, as liberal-minded wife and Black-despising husband have a battle of wills over whether to assist the runaway couple, a young man who works on the station and a 'half-caste' girl married to an older man. One literary critic even reads this motif as central to the narrative, as the occasion of the white couple's marital discord²³ (although there is also 'another man' on the scene to provide the classic opposition between Australian and English lovers). After she has left him, Lady Bridget's distraught station-owner husband is finally forced to wish:

If only he had yielded to her then about the Blacks! If he had curbed his anger, shown sympathy with the two wild children of Nature who were better than himself, in this at least that they had known how to love and cling to each other in spite of the blows of fate! ... That he should have lost Bridget because of the loves of Wombo and Oola! It was an irony – as if God were laughing at him.²⁴

There is a marked contradiction here between the romantic 'wild children of nature' image, and the denigration implied in the final words. The affinity of the black and the white lovers is momentary, and an occasion for irony on the man's part.

In Praed's novel, then, this motif of elopement (which really acquires the status of a fable in colonial fiction) is linked with the romantic critique of arranged marriages as a male exchange of women's bodies. As an aspect of the exotic imaginary frontier, it is incorporated into a Romantic discourse on nature and passion as opposed to social constraints and duties, where the runaway Aboriginal couple function as an image of the white woman's desired freedom.²⁵ In this respect, it could be argued that the woman novelist, while complicit in covering up the theme of miscegenation in colonial society, is also expressing resistance to the patriarchal denial of her

personal and sexual autonomy. It is this patriarchal construction of femininity which also casts Aboriginal men in the role of sexual threat and Aboriginal women in the role of sexual rivals for white women. Insisting on sympathy with the Aboriginal *couple* against the forces of the Law, a woman writer may be read as subverting this aspect of patriarchal ideology. That is, the fable of the runaway marriage in colonial fiction can be *read* differently when women use it.

Rosa Praed's *Fugitive Anne* (1902) presents interesting variations on the theme of escape, and an ambivalent challenge to the construction of the black man as sexual threat. The heroine runs away from her brutal husband with the help of an Aboriginal man, once her childhood playmate, now her servant. Rejoicing in her new-found freedom in a manner reminiscent of North American 'wilderness narratives' but rare for a female protagonist,²⁶ she writes in her notebook: 'Better death in the wild woods than life in chains' and 'Anne Marley hails Nature, the emancipator!'²⁷ There is a 'strange affinity' (p. 34) between her and Kombo [sic], as together they become outlaws from both the white community (represented by her pursuing husband) and the local Aboriginal tribes who are Kombo's traditional enemies.

But the tensions of race class and sexual difference in this relationship are exacerbated by the discovery that the settler friends to whom Anne was fleeing have been killed by blacks. This incident recalls the Hornet Bank killings, as described in Praed's memoirs of her youth in outback Queensland, when a neighbouring family was killed by Aborigines in a reprisal raid. In that text there is a noticeable conflict between her horrified reporting of white men's tales of black treachery and violence and her appreciative accounts of childhood experience with Aboriginal women and children.²⁸ Arguing from this autobiographical material that *Fugitive Anne* is structured by the 'fantasy element of [Praed's] connection with the Aborigines', Healy makes much of Anne's sexual vulnerability and the sexual fear he attributes to Praed;²⁹ but this reading ignores the novel's freedom fantasy, and ultimately contributes to the patriarchal myth of white women's sexual fear of Aboriginal men, which has so often been used to justify white men's violence against the colonized and the subordination of 'their' women.

What is one to make of Praed's choice of a name, Kombo, which colloquially refers to sexual relations between black women and white men ('going combo')? In the novel, Kombo is principally cast in the role of the good servant, guardian and, indeed, devotee (for Anne is regarded as a kind of goddess, and demonstrates her powers when necessary by bursting into song with the 'Ave Maria' or 'God Save the Queen!'). The major narrative tension is between this role and the text's racial discourse, which repeatedly swings between affirmations of affinity and denigrations of the 'barbaric' Aboriginal. Evolutionist ideas enter the realm of the truly fantastic when Anne and Kombo find themselves in a 'lost civilization' of South American (Mayan) descent, and comparisons are drawn denigrating the more 'primitive' Australian blacks in favour of these 'red men'. It is, significantly, in relation to this more 'civilized' race that the problem of Anne's sexuality is played out: now that there is a suitable European hero on the scene, she becomes jealous of his sexual interest in the Mayan high priestess; but her 'childlike and feminine' expression of this jealousy arouses the hero, who is already turned off by the priestess's lack of 'womanly weakness and its consequent charm' (pp. 373, 363). It is a neatly negotiated vindication of feminine sexuality in the approved late Victorian mode: refined, responsive, more 'evolved'.

Moving away from the genre of outback adventure, we find in Barbara Baynton's *Human Toll* (1907) a strange colonial version of the novel of female development. Here the problematic nature of feminine sexuality is played out in the conflict between the somewhat autistic heroine, Ursula, and her sexually aggressive 'other', Mina. The Aboriginal couple who fill the conventional role of 'good servants' attempt to protect Ursula from Mina's victimization and to help her protect Mina's child from abuse, just as they alone had attempted to protect Ursula as a child. 'There is no colour line in love', comments the narrator.³⁰ Yet it is their love for the helpless child and their near-helpless mistress that is invoked here: the 'colour line' in sexual love remains a taboo subject in this colonial text.

Katherine Prichard's celebrated broaching of this taboo, in *Coonardoo* (1929), effectively writes the white woman out of the script: Hugh's wife is a stereotyped frivolous and sexually repressive white woman. More to the point, it is his mother who trains Coonardoo as a household servant 'for him', as it were. Her role may be read as contributing to the Aboriginal

woman's ultimate destruction as the prized object over which the two white men, Hugh and Geary, fight. The insoluble problem of individual love between black and white is played out in terms of male desire only. Despite her central role in this novel, Coonardoo comes to symbolize the silence and paralysis of will which is the usual fate of the black woman in colonial fiction³¹ – her presence in the text is signified by images of shadows, and by her habitual murmur of assent, 'Eeh-mm'.³²

The Incredible Journey is the only colonial woman's text of this period that I can find in which the Aboriginal woman is central to the narrative and is constructed as a subject in her own right. The story of Iliapa's journey across the desert to reclaim her son, abducted by a ruthless and powerful white man, is structured as a quest in which she undergoes physical and spiritual trials, and in which she is helped or hindered by a variety of other people. Foremost among these is Polde, the woman friend who accompanies her and whose characterisation is a foil to hers. The relationship between them is represented as central and sustaining. As Margaret Allen points out in her Introduction, this novel is extraordinary in placing Aboriginal characters at the centre of the novel and encouraging readers to 'identify' with them – but I think it could be added that the centrality of *women* characters is even more significant in the history of discursive representations of Aborigines.

Their relations with other women are also harmonious and supportive. The squatter's wife and daughters help them on their way with transport, food, and new dresses that they quickly 'run up' on the sewing machine; it is made clear that this relationship is based upon reciprocity, on the wife's gratitude to Iliapa's father for finding her children when they were lost in the bush. The tribal women whom they meet while crossing the desert help them escape from the men of their tribe, who are determined to kill the two travellers in reprisal for their disturbing some male ritual objects – there is a suggestion here of female bonding against male power.

This is one of several incidents in the novel where tribal laws are broken, and which suggest the disruption caused to traditional culture by white invasion and settlement. While it is an accident which makes Iliapa's husband believe that he has broken tribal law, the women involved in similar transgressions of the law act deliberately. In the incident from which the action of the novel springs, Iliapa's aunt sends a message to her designated husband-to-be, purporting to be from the girl's father, breaking the

agreement – an action apparently motivated by the aunt's desire to wield power. Polde's interference with the sacred objects is said to be done out of ignorance, because she had not been brought up to believe the things that Iliapa had been taught (p. 92). There is a suggestion here that the women are avenging their exclusion from male power and ritual. Martin seems, on the evidence of this novel, to have respected the strength and centrality of Aboriginal people's beliefs but to have harboured hopes that they would 'modernise' in adaptation to white culture.

The characterisation of Iliapa is worth commenting on in this connection. She is knowledgeable about and respectful of traditional law, but she is also said to have some characteristics like the whites – the capacity to work hard and with concentration in her duties as a housemaid (which Polde definitely lacks, pp. 46-7), and she 'had learned to think of the future', like white people (p. 74). Similarly her husband is said to have almost an 'individual conscience', unlike the tribal sense of right and wrong (p. 30). Yet in the final scenes of the novel, when the man who has abducted her son tries to trick them out of claiming him back, it is Polde who resists him and gathers support from other whites by her loud denunciations – the more 'Aboriginal' of the two women (that is, the less assimilated or adapted) is better able to defend herself against their white enemy. Still, the final card in Polde's triumphant denunciation of the man is to invoke the aid of Queen Victoria who (so she has learned from the station children) is 'the bestest little queen of England and of the Blacks' (p. 78, p. 155). Martin's vision of race reconciliation veers perilously close to the comic, yet the final scene of family reconciliation returns the novel to the heroic mode.

When the present Queen of England opened the new Parliament House in Canberra recently (May 1988), there was a large and vocal demonstration by Aborigines outside the building. Needless to say, they were not appealing for regal protection but stating their political presence. Their shouts could be heard behind the mild and modulated broadcast commentary which, absurdly, refused to acknowledge their presence. When the demarcation line between inside and outside was again broached by a small girl dressed in the colours of the Aboriginal Land rights movement stepping out of the crowd to present a bouquet to the Queen, the air of parody created by this intervention was complete.

In Australia in 1988 Aborigines are very much in evidence as actors on the contemporary scene. From all over the continent they converged on Sydney to march on Invasion Day, January 26 (otherwise known as 'birthday of a nation') – no 'poor remnants of a dying race', but a strong movement of all those who claim kin as Aborigines, based on the Land Rights campaign but sinking its internal differences and spreading wider.

Is Australian culture still colonial, then? There are clear signs at last that the hegemonic culture's certainties about race difference are being challenged. The discourses on Aboriginality now available include, most significantly, that of a political identity as Aboriginal which is claimed by growing numbers, a discourse on survival and independence. The politics of Land Rights appear at last to have forced talks about a treaty on land ownership. Affirmations of this kind make it possible to *see* that assertions of unity by the hegemonic culture, in contrast, are always made at the expense of the excluded 'others' – Aborigines in particular, but other cultural groups, more recently migrated than the Anglo-Celtic majority, as well.

Aboriginal women are now speaking for themselves, and affirming that their primary commitment is to their people's movement. If an appeal to women's unity is at all possible today, it must be made in recognition of this primary commitment. It cannot be, like Louisa Lawson's call to recognise 'wives and mothers like ourselves', based on a limited definition of 'women', but must include all aspects of womanhood, and recognise that 'we' are both like and unlike each other. It must be an appeal for a politics of affinity in particular women's struggles, not a claim to sameness, identity. A recognition of difference is as politically important today as the recognition of likeness was in 1897: difference, that is, as embodying a history that is autonomous yet contingent with our own, as white women. Patriarchal definitions of women's difference as a failure to be the same as men are paralleled by racist definitions of the difference of colonized peoples as a failure to be the same as the colonizers. But it is not the same structure of oppression, not the same experience: Aboriginal women are teaching us this, above all.

Let one of their number have the last word here, at least. Speaking of the Aboriginal movement, Bobbi Sykes uses the female metaphor of pregnancy and birth afresh:

We do not always talk
of our pregnancy
for we are pregnant
with the thrust of freedom;
And our freedom looks to others
As a threat.³³

NOTES

1. Aboriginal occupation and ownership of the land was not recognised in law, which regarded the land as *terra nullius*, belonging to no-one. See Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1988).
2. This analysis of the discursive operation of racial difference derives from Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978) and from Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question', *Screen*, 24, 6 (1983), pp. 18-36), and 'Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, no. 28 (Spring 1984), pp. 125-33.
3. Susan Sheridan, "'Temper, Romantic; Bias, Offensively Feminine": Australian Women Writers and Literary Nationalism' in Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, eds, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1986), pp. 49-58.
4. cf. Susan Gardner, 'A "'Vert to Australianism": Beatrice Grimshaw and the Bicentenary', *Hecate* 13,2 (1987/8), pp. 31-68, p. 51.
5. Stephen Muecke, 'Available Discourses on Aborigines in Peter Botsman, ed, *Theoretical Strategies* (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1982), pp. 98-111.
6. 'A Word for the Blacks', *The Dawn*, November 1, 1987, p. 1.
7. C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction Of Aboriginal Society*, vol. 1 (Canberra: A.N.U. Press, 1970), p. 1; see also Raymond Evans, 'Keeping Australia Clean White' in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, eds, *A Most Valuable Acquisition* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1988), pp. 170-88, p. 172.
8. Various documents cited in Jean Woolmington, *Aborigines in Colonial Society 1788-1850* (North Melbourne: Cassell, 1973) and Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984). Henry Reynolds comments that with 'scientific racism' came the loss of even the Christian belief in the 'brotherhood of man': *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 128-9.
9. Gillian Cowlshaw, 'Australian Aboriginal Studies: the Anthropologists' Accounts' in Marie de Lepervanche and Gillian Bottomley, eds, *The Cultural Construction of Race* (Sydney: Sydney Studies in Society and Culture no 4, 1988), pp. 60-79.
10. *ibid.*, p. 64.
11. Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', *Historical Studies*, 22, 86 (1986), pp. 116-31.

12. See for example Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji 1835-1930* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), pp. 170-72.
13. Lake, op.cit., and Judith Allen, 'Rose Scott's Vision: Feminism and Masculinity 1880-1925' in Barbara Caine et al., eds, *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledges* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 157-66.
14. Louisa Lawson, *The Lonely Crossing* (privately published, c. 1900); on Martin, see Margaret Allen, 'Catherine Martin, Writer: Her Life and Ideas', *Australian Literary Studies*, 13, 2 (1987), pp. 184-97.
15. As the poet explained it later: see Elizabeth West, 'White women in Colonial Australia', *Refractory Girl* nos. 13/14 (1977), pp. 54-60, p. 58. Dunlop's poem is cited at length in Elizabeth Webby, 'The Aboriginal in Early Australian Literature', *Southerly*, no. 40 (1980), pp. 45-63.
16. First published 1923. Page references in the text are to *The Incredible Journey* (London: Pandora, 1987).
17. This commonplace of late nineteenth-century feminism may have derived its evolutionary credentials from the biologists, Geddes and Thomson, who argued that female energies previously allocated to reproduction would now be placed at the disposal of society, which would gain from the predominance of feminine altruistic feelings over the more primitive masculine egoism; see Jill Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution' in Martha Vicinus, ed, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 140-54, p. 145.
18. Lawson told Mary Gilmore that he wouldn't risk ridicule by writing about Blacks, so she reported in a letter to R.H. Croll, 28 December 1946, in *Letters*, selected and edited by W. Wilde (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980), p. 219.
19. Bhabha, 'The Other Question', op.cit.
20. Gibson, op.cit., pp. 187-8; they were, of course frequently enslaved by white men: see Reynolds, *Frontier*, pp. 73-4.
21. Rosa Praed, *Policy and Passion* (London: Bentley, 1881), p. 34.
22. Gibson, op.cit., p. 185.
23. J.J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), pp. 69-70.
24. Rosa Praed, *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* [1915] (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 285.
25. Later women writers construct the Aboriginal woman as symbol of the sexual desire denied to white women in patriarchal culture: see Susan Sheridan, 'Women Writers' in Laurie Hergenhan, ed. *A New Literary History of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988).
28. On women in captivity-and wilderness-narratives, see Annette Kolodny, 'Turning the Lens on "The Panther Captivity": a Feminist Exercise in Practical Criticism', *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 2 (1981), pp. 329-345.
27. Rosa Praed, *Fugitive Anne* (London: John Long, 1902), p. 31; page references in text to this edition.
28. Rosa Praed, *My Australian Girlhood* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1902), p. 4 et passim.

29. Healy, op. cit., p. 66-8.
30. Barbara Baynton, *Human Toll* [1907] repr. in Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson, eds, *The Portable Barbara Baynton* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), p. 217.
31. Abena P.A. Busia, 'Miscegenation as metonymy; sexuality and power in the colonial novel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 9, 3 (1986), pp. 360-72; on the role of the 'native servant' in white women's novels of female autonomy, see Gayatri Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 13, 1 (1986), pp. 243-61, pp. 253-4.
32. Sue Thomas, 'Interracial Encounters in Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*', *World Literature Written in English*, 27, 2 (1987), pp. 234-44, p. 242.
33. From 'Cycle' in Kevin Gilbert, ed, *Inside Black Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), p. 38.



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